

# Flat Classroom Conference

Ideation Nation: Citizenship in the Global E-Learning Economy

## Resources:

Flat Classroom Conference Website: <http://www.flatclassroomconference.com>  
Ning (educational network): <http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/>  
Virtual Flat Classroom wiki: <http://vflatclassroom.flatclassroomproject.org/>

*The conference that changed lives and cast a vision for the future of education.....*

The Flat Classroom Conference brought more than 150 education leaders, teachers and students together to Qatar, in January 2009, to envision the future of education. Award winning authors such as Thomas Friedman ([The World is Flat](#), Pulitzer Prize), and Don Tapscott ([Growing Up Digital](#), [Wikinomics](#)) with students and teachers from very diverse backgrounds such as Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United States, China, Australia, Pakistan, India, Iraq, Ethiopia, South Africa, and beyond. The student videos and reflections on the conference website (<http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com>) show the positive affect that the conference had on reducing stereotypes, not only of the Middle East, but of one another.

The knowledge gained from conducting this conference on a small scale basis of students and educators can now be increasingly scaled up for future conferences and best practices. The methods used can be shared with others in education to further this method. This conference was not a lecture-based conference but primarily a project-based conference using the latest in educational research in project based learning to rework how content is delivered in a conference format. Using small teams, group presentations, and multiple interactions between students and educators, a rich, interactive environment evolved. Many presenters, educators, and students have expressed their favorable opinion in their post-conference reflections of the need to deploy this method of improving education on a global basis.

The conference broke down barriers and provided a platform and methodology for learning that saw students as participants and presenters, teachers as contributors and learners, and presenters as facilitators. It also brought together a multi-cultural group of people from around the world and raised awareness of what life is like in the Middle East, enhanced understanding of other cultures and increased confidence to interact with and learn from different people. The conference was also important educationally as it showed the power of web-based, 21<sup>st</sup> century tools to foster better communication, collaboration and creation. For example, students were grouped with those of other cultures, and rather than let language divide the students, Google Translate was used to bridge language barriers and create productive, collaborative work groups. The addition of a virtual audience who provided peer review and support was also a key element during the event.

By having the students focus on the global issue of their choice, many well developed potential global projects emerged to tackle such important issues as Poverty, Racism, Educational Improvement, and the new face of Civic Responsibility. These videos and wikis are moving into the educational realm to provide educators with factual data directly from students about how positive global social change can be enacted through cutting edge tools like social networks.

More importantly, the Flat Classroom Conference demonstrated the relevance and power of project-based learning as a conference format and reinforced the concept that 'doing is learning' through the student summit action projects.



*Cultural understanding and friendship*

## Conference Theme and Vision

### ***Ideation Nation: Citizenship in the Global E-learning Economy***

The process of ***ideation*** is the “forming and relating of ideas” or the “conceptualization of a mental image.”

We wanted to take the current knowledge and experiences of the past and future **Flat Classroom project** students and teachers to envision the future of education, discuss the best ways to use Web 2.0 technologies and design a global project around a social issue. Our aim was to discuss how these technologies can improve the world as we know it today. Our aim was also to act as we believe that, by bringing people together for this event something truly special would emerge that none of us as yet can understand.

This is not a conference just about learning but about creating thought - sharing with others, learning, and producing information for others to learn from as well.

Our subtitle is ***Citizenship in a Global E-learning Economy*** because the “flattened” nature of classrooms is truly developing an e-learning economy where educators, preservice teachers, students, and teachers provide audience, feedback, and information to one another as the authentic audience of one another. It is essential that schools understand the importance of global audience as part of an effective educational curriculum.

We wanted participants to be part of an Ideation Nation: Students and Educators learning about current trends and sharing our thoughts to help move us all along the learning curve towards better global educational practice.

## The Flat Classroom Conference

24-26 January, 2009

Hosted by Qatar Academy

The conference was envisioned by Julie Lindsay and Vicki Davis, co-founders of the Flat Classroom Project, an award winning global collaborative project based on the book *The World is Flat*, by Pulitzer Prize winning author, Thomas Friedman, who also spoke at the opening session. Julie is currently Head of Information Technology and E-Learning at Qatar Academy (<http://123elearning.blogspot.com>), while Vicki is Technology Director at Westwood Schools in Camilla, Georgia, USA and writes the top teaching blog in education (<http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com>.)

The Flat Classroom Project is a global, collaborative project using Web 2.0 tools for connection, communication, collaboration and creation which has won multiple awards including best online learning project in the world from ISTE (International Society of Technology Educators,) a co sponsor of the conference. The concept and practice of 'flattening' the classroom draws on 21st century pedagogical practices that include personal learning networks, online learning and a constructivist approach using established and emerging technologies. The aim of the conference was to gather together leaders, educators and students to workshop, discuss and take action about what it means to lead, teach, learn and live in an increasingly flat world. It was the culmination of over 2 years of work in global collaborative online projects by Julie and Vicki during which time they established the Flat Classroom Project and other global projects which received multiple awards from the international educational and e-learning communities.



*Student Summit, QA Student Tech team, Presenters and Facilitators*

The conference was designed to have two strands: **Leadership Workshop** and **Student Summit**. Each of these ran interdependently, joining together for key plenary keynotes as well as discussion/interaction sessions.

### Presenters

**Vicki Davis** - Technology Director at Westwood Schools in Camilla, Georgia, USA

**Julie Lindsay** - Head of Information Technology and E-Learning at Qatar Academy

**Dr John Turner** - Flat Classroom Teacher and Digital Educator

**Dr Don Knezek** - CEO of International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)

**Lynn Nolan** - Senior Strategic Initiatives Officer, ISTE

**Jeff Utecht** - Educational Technology consultant, based at International School Bangkok

**Frank Guttler** - Screen Education Consultant and Visual Literacy Advocate



## Student Summit

No. of classrooms	10
Countries represented	Australia, Ethiopia, India, Oman, Pakistan, USA, Qatar, Iraq, Sudan, South Africa
No. of students	40 total, (24 international, 16 local)
Age of students	10-18, mostly 15-17

Students were grouped into mixed teams of 4. The main aim was to envisage the next Flat Classroom Project based on social and global issues in the world. Using the power of face-to-face connectivity they followed a program that asked them to:

- Learn about cultural differences and become comfortable working with someone different
- Brainstorm current social/global issues and choose a topic as a team
- Prepare a 'pitch' for a project, investigate how to prepare and deliver this
- Deliver their pitch in teams to the Leadership strand and be provided with verbal and rubric-based feedback
- Prepare a verbal and multimedia presentation to fully deliver their ideas to an audience,

In addition:

- Winning teams spent the last day working on project ideas and advanced multimedia skills to prepare a final video to play at the closing ceremony
- The remaining teams worked on 2 final activities:
  - Joining with Leadership strand and working on Web 2.0 tools in education, brainstorming in teams, leading to each team putting forward a spokesperson to deliver an 'elevator' speech by rotation to all other teams
  - Working on a Digital Citizenship activity and exploring best-practice attitudes and practices for being a responsible, reliable and safe online learner



*Students 'pitching' team project to teachers for feedback*

## Leadership Workshop

Over 80 registrants, including 7 presenters, 3 facilitators, over 20 international leaders and teachers from Australia, China, Ethiopia, France, Hong Kong, India, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and the USA. Over 50 local registrants came from international and local K-12 schools, SEC, ictQATAR and tertiary institutions.

### Program Summary

- Workshop sessions on flat classroom pedagogy with an opportunity for hands-on with Web 2.0 and multimedia tools
- Presentation and discussion sessions on leading for technology integration, ISTE iNETS standards, and flat classrooms project development
- Opportunities to interact with the student teams and discuss their ideas in order to provide feedback and be part of the same learning



*Julie presenting at the Opening Ceremony*

## Conference Web 2.0 Communications

Another aim of the conference was to not only talk about learning in a flat world but to practice 'flat learning' during the event. To this end we implemented strategies using online tools as well as designed sessions throughout so that we would be communicating with and interacting with a global audience. This included:

**Social networking as an educational tool:** To bring real-time and virtual participants together we used a tool called a Ning. This allows for sharing of resources, multimedia, blog posts and links to conference material on wikis etc. It is a tool that creates the infrastructure for a community of learners.

**Live chat as an essential communication tool:** The use of 'backchanneling' as a tool to foster inter-connections between the conference participants and the world. A backchannel is an online chat room used for educational discussion in the background during presentations or other sessions. It allows participants to carry on a conversation, share resources and ask questions of others.

**Streaming video:** The use of uStream.tv as a tool to send video out via a website so that others around the world could see and hear each session in real time. These were also recorded and archived on the Flat Classrooms uStream.tv website. In combination with the backchannel this tool allowed external participants to see, hear and respond via chat-interaction with face-to-face participants and recorded the activities for later viewing.

## Plenary Sessions For All

As part of the busy schedule a number of sessions during the 3 days were spent as a whole conference cohort.

**The opening session:** Overview of flat classroom project development and what it means to be an educator, a leader and a learner in the 21st Century with flattened global opportunities, and a Vicki Davis presentation

Live session with **Thomas Friedman**, author of *The World is Flat*. The Flat Classroom Project is featured in the latest edition of his book and Tom has been supporting the project from afar for a couple of years. He was Skyped in to talk about his books, including the most recent *Hot, Flat and Crowded*. However, he made a point of wanting to converse with the students and answer their questions.

Recording of session available on Ning at <http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/>

**Conference dinner:** with guest speaker from HSBC Bank Nicole Van Hattem and "What globalization means to employment: flat world employees who succeed"



*'Elevator speech', student 'selling' an emerging technology for education*

**Ted Talks:** A chance for students and presenters to talk to the cohort for 10-15 minutes on a topic that they wanted to inspire everyone with

- **Ted Talks 1**
  - Jeff Utecht - Topic: 'You.....You are the web'
  - Student Group 1: Osama Bin Zaid School, Oman Topic: 'Being a Citizen in the Global Community'
  - John Turner - Topic: 'The digital learning revolution is already underway; and education's response?'
- **Ted Talks 2**
  - Student Group 2: Anne Baird (teacher) - Topic: 'Digiteen-what it means to be a digital citizen- the Wedderburn experience'
  - Ranjith Punnose (HSBC Bank) - Topic: 'Using technology to make the world a better place, focusing on the power of education'
  - Frank Guttler - Topic: 'Thinking about Emerging Models of Digital Production & Distribution'
- **Workshop sessions** for student pitch delivery and feedback, final student presentations and voting for



best teams, Web 2.0 workshop and elevator speech

- **Closing session:** Student videos from winning teams and Don Tapscott

- Live session with **Don Tapscott**, author of *Growing Up Digital*, and *Wikinomics* during the final wrap-up of conference. The sister project, Horizon Project is featured in Don's new book *Grown Up Digital*, published November 2008. The highlight of this was seeing students from all countries come up to the microphone and ask questions, this was such an amazing opportunity for enhanced understanding.  
Recording of session available on Ning at <http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/>

## More Conference Highlights

**Student Videos:** During the Student Summit all student teams worked towards pitching an idea for a new flat classroom project that could be realistically implemented later this year. At the end of the 2nd day, after a final team presentation we voted for the top 4 who then had the chance to work all of the next day on refining their pitch into a short multimedia piece. These 4 finalists worked with experts, including Frank Guttler, multimedia guru and former AFI screen education leader, on creating a final video that could be played at the closing ceremony and that could then be voted on as the winner. All teams, 4 students in each, were composed of people from different schools and cultures who prior to coming to Qatar or to the summit had not known each other before.

**Flat Classroom Debates:** We organised an inaugural debate in Qatar that was also a virtual link-up and interaction with **Educon 2.1**, an education conference happening simultaneously to the Flat Classroom Conference at the Science Leadership Academy, Philadelphia, PA, USA. The debate followed the style of the successful **Doha Debates**, as organised by Qatar Foundation and broadcast by the BBC. There was an opportunity for audience members from both sides of the world to interact with the teams and ask questions. A backchannel also allowed other participants globally to be part of this session. There was also a final poll to determine a winning team of the debate. We used an Elluminate room (virtual classroom) to bring the two sessions from opposite sides of the world together. Debate Topic: "Education Systems successfully prepare students for flat world global challenges". Teams were made up of leaders, teachers and students.

**Ted Talks by students:** Two student groups presented Ted Talks. The group from Australia, recent participants in the Digiteen project, presented via Skype from Australia itself! Their teacher, Anne Baird, was here in Qatar to facilitate. The group from Oman talked with inspiration about what it means to be a global student.



*Students from Australia present a Ted Talk via Skype - they are on summer break but chose to present*

## Major Outcomes and Breakthroughs

**Cultural understanding:** Raised awareness of what life is like in the Middle East, enhanced understanding of other cultures and improved confidence when talking to and working with people from other countries. Some schools from the USA and Australia were reticent about letting their students come to the ME. Those who came are determined to go back and spread the word that these decisions were based on misinformation and possible media bias.

This blog post from **Steve R**, a student who attended from **Houston**, says a lot:

<http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/profiles/blogs/being-back-in-houston-texas> written Feb. 7, 2009

So it's been about a week and half since i've been back from the most amazing trip of my life and i must say that for some reason, i feel indifferent about life in Houston. I guess i can say that going somewhere really far from home made me change my mindset completely. I walk around campus between classes and after school and encounter other students or teachers that ask me how was the trip? And i NEVER get tired of telling them my stories or memories. But then again it makes me sad because i want to go back. ha.

One thing that really annoys me is when people would react hysterically when i told them i was going to Qatar. They would say ignorant things like "ooh you better take a gun" or "ooh hopefully you don't get bombed." And that completely made me mad. I just hate the fact that people are completely blinded by the media and in some ways it sickens me. Most people just do not know. So now that i'm back, i just simply correct everybody when they say things like that. Another thing that wows them is when they see pictures of Qatar and it just amazes them. I just tell them, see? It is a beautiful and safe place. Not to mention becoming more and more modern each second.

Another thing is that this trip has made me add another goal to my list of goals in life. And it's a pretty short list that consists of graduating from college and getting a masters and making my dad proud, owning my own successful business (possibly an empire), having a wonderful beautiful family, and owning a Ferrari haha. Added on is now traveling around the world. This trip has made me want to experience other cultures in other countries. I must admit that Houston is a very diverse city but nothing compares to actually going to the specific country. I want to travel to the countries where i made new friends in Qatar. I most definitely want to go back to Doha! Life here in Houston just isn't the same. I want to get out of this box that i am in. That would pretty much satisfy my life. I think.

**The power of 21st Century web tools:** This conference clearly demonstrated the power of using 21st Century tools (largely Web 2.0) to foster better communication, collaboration and creation. This has set the standard for future events. A conference cannot be held in isolation from the rest of the world. Others who cannot make it to a venue need to be included as well. There is no reason not to include a guest speaker or a group presentation or to send out streamed video of the sessions if the bandwidth supports the tools.

**Project-based learning as a conference format:** In addition to the last point, the adoption of project-based learning, especially working in mixed adult and student groups, is the future of Flat Classroom events, and is a model that others can adopt. We came to this clear realisation during the event when outcomes from the Student Summit met and in fact exceeded our expectations. We also realised this when some teachers in the leadership strand asked why they were not included in developing their own project as well as the students! In other words, why had we organised some sessions in the traditional style of talking about change and reform, where just down the corridor were groups of students with teacher facilitators actually modeling it. Good point!





*Vicki and students from Oman*

**Student video making capabilities:** The final teams, topics and videos stunned us all. The winning team will now develop their project to be implemented in September 2009. All videos can be viewed on the Ning at <http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com>

### **Students as meaningful contributors and participants:**

Best summed up by this recent blog post:

<http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/profiles/blogs/announcing-student-project>

Congratulations to **Eracism** and students from wiki team 4 - Nastassja (Qatar), John (USA), Yaqsan (Oman), Antonia (India). In their words: "Our aim is to give teenagers all over the world an opportunity to express their opinions and ideas about issues in the current world."

Students - although one group officially "won" - you are ALL the winners. We are both so thrilled with the amazing work you've done - your engagement on the Ning and belief that we can build the bridges today through the Internet that society of tomorrow can walk across! The Eracism group has officially won the competition and we will be working through the details to begin this project probably in August/ September of 2009. Stay posted on the Ning as we work with this - if you'd like to volunteer to work with this project, all students who attended this year's conference are invited to be a member of the "Advisory Board" for Eracism - we will create a group on the Ning - just join the group.

Additionally, Face Poverty and TechTrust have elements that we are currently incorporating into the 2010 conference and hope to announce within the next few months - we hope that the students on this project will consider being involved in the Student Advisory group for the 2010 conference. Artistmatic has some math teachers thinking about how this idea can help math education and we are discussing and searching for some math teachers around the world to help implement an educational network around using creativity to teach math.

Whether you realize it or not, each student group has fundamentally contributed to the ideas of what CAN be done to flatten classrooms in meaningful ways that improve our world! The conference has transformed all of us who saw just what students could do in a project based conference environment and we are working behind the scenes to improve and include more classes in the future.

**Net Generation Education Project:** a new collaboration with Don Tapscott  
From the project wiki: <http://netgened.wikispaces.com/>

The **Net Generation Education Project** is the replacement for the **Horizon Project** and will include approximately 10 schools with 300 students. The application process is now open for schools who wish to participate in the project. Last year, **Don Tapscott** keynoted the **Horizon Project 2008** which focused on having students envision the future of education via web collaboration and video. The reading documents include the **Horizon Report 2009** from the New Media Consortium and Educause. Don Tapscott went on to include this project in his new Book, **Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World**. So, the next level of "flattening" is to not only have classrooms connect but to have the classrooms connect in new and more far-reaching ways with the authors of their books.

In the same genre students in this project will interact on a Ning jointly created with Don Tapscott. Don will post weekly questions to the Discussion forum and leave video messages to the students. It will be a read/write project. He will also interact LIVE via a webinar. Don has a vision for improved educational outcomes and is reaching out to interact directly with students through his challenge and this project. Additionally, the **Discovery Educator Network** is going to be providing and sharing tips and information on effective video presentations and how-to's and a book club group for educators.

We will be studying this year's **Horizon Report (released January 2009)** but adding to it the intro and Chapter 5 from Don's book, **Grown Up Digital: (Rethinking Education)** to the reading assignments for students. Students will be divided into groups to analyze some of the key trends in reworking education to create collaborative report written with other students from around the world. Each team will have a project manager and assistant project manager to help facilitate the work on the team. These "managers" will be students with teachers working as facilitators. Each student will cast their vision for the future of education with a video to be uploaded on our project ning. All videos will be automatically entered into Don Tapscott's **Net Generation Education Challenge competition** and could win scholarship money for future educational pursuits.

**Creation of a Community of Learners:** Through the use of educational networking (Ning and wiki) students, teachers and parents have created a community of learners. The sociability of learning and the impact it has on improved outcomes has been clearly documented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. **More reflections about the Flat Classroom Conference** can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/b9ge3v> - these include multimedia responses and are REALLY worth watching.



*Student team work*

### **A teacher reflection: Heather Davis from China.**

<http://flatclassroomconference.ning.com/profiles/blogs/reflections-of-the-flat>

"How four days can change a person's viewpoint and comfort zone. I leave with a understanding that no stereotypes actual exist but are created by the media and by fear. I leave with an understanding that people all over the world are the same though the clothes and cultures may be different. A love of family, country, and friends exists in all nations. A desire for a better world, a desire to solve our global problems together, a desire for information and education and a desire to share openly and willingly exists. I leave with an appreciation of the elegance of the traditional dress. I leave with memories of laughter as we all shared common experiences. I leave with the memories of the beautiful friendly eyes of the Qatari woman who were veiled, of their help and their willingness to help. I have memories of an incredible sense of fashion, beauty and a love of family. I learned to appreciate the flowing scroll of the Arabic language as I saw it written beside trademarks such as Carrefour, McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Mercedes, Valentino and Gucci."

later Heather says,

"I also learned to begin to hope again. To see promise in the future. The students who came to Qatar were not just a part of the conference but led the way. It gives me new focus and a determination to move forward and create authentic global connections with and for myself and my students."

### **In the words of Salim Al-Busaidi, the teacher from Oman**

"I think the students have proved that they are real leaders and the teachers have successfully contributed to preparing these leaders for the future."

### **From Ann-Maree, a parent from Australia**

"We all here at Hawkesdale (small rural town) are proud of the achievements of our 3 students, Emily, Carly and Tara and our teacher Mrs Anne Mirtschin. They have represented us at a high level and have gained so much information - it has been a life time experience for them. We thank Julie Lindsay and all her fellow workers for this great experience. Julie, while we have not meet you will be entrenched into our hearts FOR the efforts you have gone to give our contingent such an experience. We are proud of you all!"



*Julie and Vicki with our sponsors, HSBC Bank*





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Signage recognizing the sponsors of the event was located in prominent places at all conference entrances, the major plenary sessions, presentation materials, programs, and all websites.